

HOUSEHOLD DISPOSAL OF UNUSED OR EXPIRED MEDICATIONS

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There are two major concerns regarding household disposal of unused or expired medications. First, health threats may occur when other people, particularly children, mistakenly acquire the prescription drugs if they are carelessly disposed. Secondly, some of these products can cause environmental damage if disposed into the sewer system because these materials are not adequately destroyed by sewer treatment plants and can enter the water supply. The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has cautioned consumers against disposing of hormones and contraceptives - which contain hormones - down the toilet or sink. One contraceptive, NuvaRing, comes with a "Do Not Flush" warning because, even after use, the ring contains estrogen that can contaminate water. Other pharmaceuticals that have been identified in the water supply are: clofibrate (Atromid, Abitrate), beta-blockers, caffeine, diazepam (Vallium), gemfibrozil (Lopid), nicotine, NSAIDS (non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs such as Ibuprofen, Naproxen, etc.), salbuterol (Covera-HS), albuterol (Proventil, Akeril, etc.), and others.

When faced with the destruction of "Controlled or Dangerous Substances" (CDS), such as addictive drugs, narcotics, etc. (contact the Drug Enforcement Agency to confirm status of any material as a CDS) either the NJ Office of Drug Control (973-504-6561) or the Federal Drug Enforcement Agency (Newark Division Office, 973-273-5000) may be consulted for the requirements regarding necessary documentation, appropriate registrations, packaging, transport and disposition.

The New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection (NJDEP, Bureau of Resource Recovery, 609-984-6985) regulates waste disposal, but most household medications are not looked upon as regulated waste. There are no regulations that specify how medications are to be adequately disposed.

The following methods of disposal are currently considered safer and more environmentally friendly than flushing down toilets or sinks:

1) Disposal in the municipal trash collection, taking precautions to ensure that children or animals cannot access the material. Non-descript packaging is advisable to avoid trash harvesting for potential reuse. (Please note that trash compactors need to render medication unusable when properly packaged and compacted.)

2) Check whether local household hazardous waste collection programs in your area accept medications for destruction.

3) Registered generators of medical waste may also dispose of medications with their regulated medical waste management company. Pharmaceuticals may be listed as "over classified" waste on medical waste tracking forms.